

write on!

writing for social justice



Creative work and resources
from New York City educators

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## Write On!: Writing for Social Justice

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*An ItAG is an Inquiry to Action Group. It's similar to a study group, but the goal is that after the group inquires into a particular topic, they will together create action around their area of study, making it a true community of praxis. The topics and themes chosen are always consistent with NYCORE's points of unity, which have to do with issues of education and social justice.*

*For more information, please log on to <http://www.nycore.org>.*



## Introduction

Lindsey Johnson and Joy Osborne

*"The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is- it's to imagine what is possible."*  
~bell hooks

Over the last seven weeks, our Inquiry to Action group has worked together to create a space of imagination. Our aim was simple: to determine what the phrase 'writing for social justice' meant to us individually, and as a group, and to transform our teaching practice through our time together.

A little under two months later, we offer you this text. A combination of our own personal musings and tools that make social justice teaching 'go,' we hope that this book inspires you to approach your next lesson, unit or long-term plan with a fresh lens.

### *Our Process*

Each participant's goal in being present was slightly different throughout the process.

Because our work takes place in a variety of different contexts, with different types of students, our learning process has been as much about ourselves as it has been about classroom teaching practice. To that end, we wrote mission statements in small groups that attempted to get at the 'heart of the matter':

*Writing for social justice* is a process that we use to critique society, struggle, the world and our own personal histories; it affirms life and struggle. Community creates trust, which allows us to be vulnerable. We become vulnerable so that we can become empowered. When we become empowered, we begin to develop actionable plans for our lives.

*Writing for social justice* gives both students and teachers a mindful purpose to our work. We want our students to have a safe space in which they question. A social justice framework allows students to develop a voice and to become creators of knowledge. We want our students to be able to use language as a way to build confidence and strengthen communication. We must honor their efforts and willingness to engage.

*Why do we write for social justice?*

We write because we believe it will matter.

We believe another world is possible and that our writing can help create it.

We believe in reading outside of our worlds to engage in conversations with the worlds of others.

We write to access our own power.

We write to help others access their power.

### *Why write for social justice?*

WE build classroom relationships that value democracy with a little "d", supporting voice and context.

WE choose critical texts to support the content of our writing.

WE find insight in power dynamics.

WE create empowerment in the belief that change is possible.

WE value students' lived experiences.

WE foster connections with real people and real audiences.

WE reflect on how we participate in a system that does not empower young people.

WE ask how do we create the same experiences in our own working environments.

WE do all of the above to be and feel alive, to be and feel active and to be and feel joy in the hope to foster more learning and more curiosity.

### *Ways You Can Use This Text*

We hope that this offering will do a few things for you, dear reader:

- Push you to think about writing for social justice in new ways
- Inspire both yours and students' creativity in your classroom
- Help you to find ways to further incorporate student voice
- Give authentic voice to the work our group has done together as a team

Thank you for reading. It has been a true pleasure to write, and to rise up, together.

paz. amor. justicia.

**Write On!**

# Personal Writing

*A collection of writing*

## My Definition of Writing for Social Justice

Rosie Frascella

Writing for social justice is a liberating and healing experience that allows people to feel and understand the how in order to let go of the why. It's about coming at our struggles and emotions sideways, so we don't get blocked by hitting them head on. It's about using authentic texts and tasks, and writing for and about us. It's about admitting you cannot be neutral on a moving train. It's about being vulnerable in order to see vulnerability.

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## Possibilities

Jennifer Phuong

*"The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is—it's to imagine what is possible."*

— bell hooks

My high school students with disabilities oftentimes struggle with identifying the beauty or purpose in the art of literature. Whether their aversion to literature stems from years of perceiving reading as an arduous task or struggling with the actual process of reading—decoding, comprehending, thinking, my students complain to me that reading is boring. They see reading as a way to improve their vocabulary and help them find a job after graduation. Only a few of my students see literature as a way of learning more about themselves, as a reflection of the world and its many inhabitants. Even fewer of my students stretch their minds to conceive of other possible worlds, merely accepting the one they were born into. Any discussion of society and its many -isms ends in my students proclaiming, "Well, that's just the way the world works."

In this age of standardized testing and "accountability", students struggle to find an opportunity to express themselves creatively, limited to the confines of A, B, C, or D. Even when asked to write their own stories, students ask what they should write. The gentle encouragement, "You can write anything you want" stymies my students, because they don't know what they want to write. I was fortunate enough to attend a school where standardized testing did not impact classroom instruction; my creativity was allowed to thrive. However, as a high school teacher in New York City, I've been mandated to emphasize and focus on the Regents above all, relegating creativity to the background, a it's-nice-if-it-happens-but-we-don't-have-time-for-that.

I want my students to be able to do more than just visualize the events of a novel or extract the themes of a story to fill in an answer sheet—I want them to imagine the possibility of a different world through the lens of a novel, a poem, a story, a painting, photograph, any medium of art. Cultivating an environment in which literature and learning lends itself to creativity and innovation should be the focus of our education system. The ability to bubble in correct answers will not help our students understand our world, nor will it help them imagine any world beyond that.

## **Saguaro**

Earth's secrets hardest earned,  
sprung from rock and cracked-dry earth  
lay coiled in a cupped palm  
hidden until  
stillness  
when coyote songs float miles.  
I bloom under star beams  
slicing through light years of atmosphere  
to the cold resting quiet of desert plane  
Settling in the absence of dew  
space between space.

I bloom for no one.  
I am Truth spoken in a burst of luminous gratitude  
in the cool, impartial net of night.  
I am the name, unspoken which calls itself.

*Marissa Metelica*

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## **The Lindsey's**

*Lindsey Johnson*

Representation of my mother. First name is my mother's maiden name (which I tell anyone when I introduce myself or if anyone comments on how popular my name is...). I am a Lindsey.

My name is so common, but unique at the same time. I feel proud as a Lindsey. The Lindsey's.

Composed mostly of women. Petite and little, but pack a lot of POWER. Boisterous, comical, energetic, *LIVELY* Lindsey's.

We live so far apart, yet I feel so close. I belong to something wonderful and great...something much bigger than myself. I'm a Lindsey.

We look alike too. "She must be...gotta be a Lindsey."

The insight of my mother to honor me with such a name, with little fame. I'll take it. I'm a Lindsey.

A special place in my mother's heart; I represent history, love, and legacy. I am a Lindsey.



## Writing as We Speak

Helen Rubinstein

The heart of the matter is that my students are unconvinced by three articles, and I am questioning my motives for giving them to them. Even when she was arguing that students should use standard English in class, Sheyenne was using nonstandard constructions. So there is the question of their awareness, to begin with—the question of the ability to code-switch, which I tend to take on assumption. They're in a college-level English class in a very good high school. Can I assume they've mastered that?

Every semester, I bring in these three readings, all of which argue that writers should write in their home English (but only *one* of which actually does use a nonstandard English). I bring these in because I want students to know that their grammar is a choice, and I want them to know the meaning or implications of that choice. But no one wants to make a choice, and I worry that, despite our discussions and examples, they don't feel comfortable even peering around the corner at the *possibility* that they might write as they speak.

That's what Orville said in class: You're not supposed to write how you speak.

Is that true? I asked, Do you all agree?, and everyone said yes.

Maybe they are right, maybe this is what they know of code-switching—but in my own upbringing, in my own upbringing where I spoke a grammar of power, where I spoke at home the same English my teachers spoke at school, or something very nearly identical, we operated at least under the assumption that writing was a very close reflection of speech.

That's why school grammar was so easy to learn and describe: it was already the only thing you ever heard.

Maybe it's my whiteness and my background that gets in the way of our having a better, more honest conversation about this subject. Maybe they sense something I cannot admit: that within my insistence on visiting this subject is a kind of condescension, an attention to something they'd prefer to ignore or resist. Race and class and difference. Maybe I'm other-ing them more than I should—maybe my insistence on discussing this topic is a kind of oppression, an insistence that *they* are different, and I am the status quo.

There was my first year at the high school, when no one would believe that the “slang” they spoke in the hallways had real grammar, so I brought in Wikipedia's entry on African American Vernacular English, with a handy chart full of examples. “In AAVE it's ‘She my sister,’ not ‘She's my sister,’” I read aloud to the class. Each example produced a kind of delayed uproar: *She my sister*, the students would repeat, laughing at what they'd just heard come from my mouth, *She my sister*, and then, from most of the students, “I *do* say that!” They were in eleventh grade, and they'd not noticed before. I notice, I hear the way they speak, because it's not my way. But when you don't write as you speak, when you never read writing that reflects your own speech, you never fully *see* your own English. No wonder it can be so hard to connect students to reading, when literature refuses to reflect reality in so many ways.

I have them read Baldwin's “Black English,” which asserts the powerfulness of owning and using one's own English—the English of a community, an English which contains words and ways of saying that other groups cannot understand. We talk about how language is a reflection of identity. The students from Trinidad and Haiti, they really get it—but the idea of choosing to use a nonstandard English, the idea of resisting

the status quo in the same way Lee Tonouchi does when he uses Hawai'ian Pidgin in his article "Da State of Pidgin Address": it's still too ridiculous. Laughable.

"Miss," they say. "You mean if I write my essay in slang, you're not gonna take off points?"

"Nope," I say. "Not if you do it intentionally. It should *show* in your choices. You should do it consistently."

Anthony says, "So if I write *idk* instead of *I don't know*, you're not gonna take off points?"

"That's a kind of spelling," I say. "It's not really dialect. It's not another English."

They don't get it.

We need more time.

This, like most of my stories about teaching, is the story of a kind of failure.

**noble**

for the class of 2013

this is a noble profession they say  
we sacrifice our

lives

as we toil away in the

centers,

on the edges, on the fringes.

saviors.

---

this is the edge for everyone but  
you,  
but us.

for us, it's home.

so, my loves,  
if this is sacrifice, if this is nobility,

*mmmm*, okay.

just know this-

when i walk into the building each  
sunnywindydarkrainystillquietloudbeautiful morning,

i

am the only one being

saved.

*Joy Osborne*

## Have You Ever Been Falsely Accused?

Elissa Vinnik

The question gives me pause. I scan through moments over the course of years, images of occasions flash through my head like films, but no single memory emerges to the forefront to claim its position, the moment when I was falsely accused. Sure, there were the false accusations from my younger brother from my childhood, but those “of course I didn’t break that” moments seem obsolete. The films come up short. I cannot say yes. This question gets at the heart of my privilege, I think. There’s something about my whiteness that prompts others to give me the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps accusations have been reframed as questions and explanations sought before accusations or my innocence has simply been assumed. It seems unfair. I think about how my many students would so likely answer this question differently. How their films might so readily produce moments. I remember the young man I watched get stopped and frisked by cops on the street on my way home from school yesterday. The prisoners whose false accusations have dictated the course of their lives and those they love. Even the word *accuse* seems to carry a kind of power. I wonder about it, so I go home later and check. The twelfth century origins of the word indicate its public nature, to report, to disclose. Its Latin root, *accusare*, means “to call to account.” In this moment when I felt lacking, I also felt called to do some accounting of my own. I recall watching my peers writing their own responses to the same question without pausing. Three more minutes, the facilitator said softly. I feel false and unprepared. And then, as we’re wrapping up, I realize my films have missed something. The false accusations from a boss of my inadequacies and, more painful, the one from a parent who, in anger and disbelief about her daughter dating a woman, falsely accused me of being unfair and of failing to be the daughter she knew. How quickly these recollections have taken their place. How much these false accusations have helped to teach me about who and what I am made of.

## **Returning to the Classroom: The things I almost forgot while pretending to be an Administrator**

*Stuart Kermes*

Having trained as a high school social studies teacher in New York City over 25 years ago, I have always thought of the classroom as my first love. My career, however, has taken me away from classroom teaching several times, most recently as the director of an alternative and a vocational school for a small urban district that had been taken over by the State. After 8 years in the excitement and pressure cooker of “accountability” and change I decided to return to my roots, so I came back to Brooklyn and took a job teaching sociology at a local community college. Falling in love with teaching and my students all over again, I gained a new perspective on my time as an administrator. Below, I offer a few lessons from the classroom that I almost forgot during my time “in charge.”

**Lesson 1:** *The most important part of the life of a school are the relationships between students and adults.* I used to remind the new teachers on staff of what all the veterans already knew, which was that “our students need to know how much you care, before they care how much you know.” How everyone in the building puts that into practice varies, but without that focus school can turn into something to be suffered through rather than looked forward to.

**Lesson 2:** *The next most important component is the relationships between the adults.* When I first began working in the district the adults had been so beaten down with budget cuts and unkept promises that many could no longer even complain. It is hard to transmit the joy and enthusiasm for learning to your students if you don’t feel it yourself in your workplace. We reorganized teachers into interdisciplinary teams with common students and planning time and introduced “looping” to a high school. All of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers followed their students to 10<sup>th</sup> grade and taught the same group for two years. As the relationships between the adults improved, the learning of the students did as well.

**Lesson 3:** *Teaching is improv.* Every day in the classroom now, I realize how different each class and each student is and that despite the plan that is written and sitting on the desk for how I have planned to spend our time together, I need to respond to where my students are at. Whether it is turning a side comment from a student into an example for the lesson, or going off on a tangent to pursue a question posed by the material, or just punting temporarily and doing something completely different to change the energy level of the classroom, I can’t be wedded to a script.

**Lesson 4:** *There is no such thing as failure.* The other day, I was walking down the corridor and a student who I had had in class several semesters before hailed me from across the hall. I was only going back to my office and did not have another commitment, but I briefly entertained the idea of claiming a pressing engagement. This was a student who had failed my course and had argued with me on several occasions about the injustice of his grade. Never having been a good liar, I instead steeled myself for another round of indignation and went over to see him. When we connected, he proceeded to thank me for my advice regarding his commitment and study habits and told me that he was passing all of his current courses and was hoping to take my class



again next semester. After he walked away, I just stood for a moment and felt thankful for being able to witness what few of us get to see – the unexpected impact we have on students long after class or school year is over.

At the moment I have no interest in returning to life as an administrator. Although I am working just as hard, if not harder, the daily rewards of sharing life with my students are much more meaningful. But if I do return, I will remember what the classroom has taught me.

## Sabor

*Abigail Ellman*

One of the characteristics of privilege is the freedom to forget that you have it. By the time I was born, my father had scrubbed away all traces of his Milwaukee lexicon and my mother had lost any Southern twang inherited from my grandmother. Without working especially hard, I learned to speak standard English as my first language. This English tasted like a sip of water after you've swallowed. It had the color of aquarium glass. It smelled like an unopened package of playing cards.

So when I landed in Caracas, Venezuela with three rusty semesters of college Spanish, what startled me more than the tropical heat that flushed my skin or the polluted air that stung my nose was the smell and taste of language everywhere.

That was why I had chosen Caracas after all: to improve my Spanish. And while I felt the exhilaration of learning, I also felt the discomfort of suddenly thick ears and a clumsy tongue. One of the characteristics of otherness is constant awareness, the utter lack of freedom to forget. I wanted desperately (even a little too desperately) to forget the taste of Spanish in my mouth, to let it disappear like English had.

So I dove in, insisting my bilingual roommate speak to me only in Spanish, no matter how inefficient simple communication was at first. She coached me on how *caraqueños* flip the S into their throats like a hissing cat, corrected me ruthlessly on my grammar and vocabulary, and fed me all the slang and bad words I could swallow.

After about four months, I was chatting competently with a coworker and he stopped me mid-sentence. "You sound just like one of those nice girls from Miami." He meant it as a compliment, but I could only hear that I still sounded American.

I practiced rolling my R's with a pencil between my teeth, trilling until I ran out of breath. I devised drills for myself--*ma, me, mi, mo, mu*--relaxing my tongue and barely coughing out the vowels. My friends made me play Scattegories with them in Spanish with no handicap. I lost badly every time, but I was encouraged by a new trend: confusion.

I was starting to confuse people. They saw my blue eyes and heard my slightly odd accent. Are you from Portugal? Are you a Chileña with grandparents from Eastern Europe? A man selling ice cream near the teleférico in Mérida thought I sounded Spanish, as in from Spain. As I ascended thousands of meters into the Andes, the air getting colder and cleaner, I felt exultant. It wasn't the altitude--I had finally gotten the taste out of my mouth.

When I moved to New York and started working with immigrants in Jackson Heights, I came into contact with Spanishes from all over the world, as well as a spectrum of Spanish-English hybrids. Unlike in Caracas, where I either spoke good Venezuelan Spanish or I didn't, and the exchange glided or stalled, every New York conversation in Spanish involved a subtle negotiation of tempo, articulation, and even minute decisions about if it would take place in Spanish at all. When people sensed their English was

better than my Spanish, the conversation flowed back to English like a rushing river, my tongue too weak to dam it.

Eating lunch with coworkers opened a new set of rules more complex than any game of Scattagories. There were as many completely different Spanishes as number of people at the lunch table, from dignified Colombian to percussive Puerto Rican Spanglish. Should I push ahead with my Venezuelanisms? Should I just speak English? Try to toggle between? There seemed to be no way to match everyone. The taste had come back, strongly, and sometimes, exhausted, I just ate lunch at my desk in silence.

My friend Rey from Caracas came to visit me in New York. I looked forward to feeling at home with him in Spanish, to that sense of rising up over the Andes. It was so comforting to hear his clipped consonants, the melodic way he asked questions, the familiar tics and interjections. I was in the middle of telling a story about my sister and he stopped me. Why are you talking like that? He imitated a slow and deliberate intonation I had picked up from a Colombian colleague. You sound weird.

The cable car plummeted.

When I woke up at the bottom, I found other people like me, all trying to be heard and understood. My friend Lizelena has lived in the US for 15 years. “Ya no soy cubana, pero I’m not American either. No sé—I’m no where. I’m in the middle.” Many carry that sense of linguistic isolation, like being marooned in a dingy on a calm sea.

Though they were rare, I know I felt moments of sensing my language before Caracas or New York. At a national conference in high school, I met a young woman with a Mississippi accent so thick that I strained to understand her. After three days, I finally told her.

“You have a really strong accent.”

“You do, too.”

At the time, I thought she was being ridiculous. Does Peter Jennings have an accent?

But, of course, an unopened package of playing cards has a special smell, different from all the other smells of the world. Of course I have an accent. And of course I can switch and match others, a skill I’m proud to use when needed. But matching has its limits, and I accept that I will sound strange to somebody. I can’t possibly lose the taste of my Spanish all the time, especially not at the lunch table.

Instead, I’m bringing awareness to my home English, the privilege it endows, my “weird” Spanish, and the way it contains the story of my learning. I’m getting more comfortable speaking my truth in my own voice, accepting that as the only voice I can really use. By claiming permission to sound exactly like myself in English and Spanish, I hope I invite others to do the same--to not mask or rinse our voices, but to savor them and speak our truths together.

# **Resources for Educators**

*A collection of lesson plans, writing prompts, student writing, classroom activities and other resources to encourage writing for social justice*

Name: Chrissy Williams  
Subject: Write On! Writing for Social Justice  
Grade level: N/a

## **Descriptive Consultancy**

*Every week, Write On! participants used the “Descriptive Consultancy” protocol to problem solve an issue. We broke up into small groups of four and each person had an opportunity to bring in a problem. This is a useful tool to bring back to school-based teacher meetings.*

As the steps of this protocol make clear, the Descriptive Consultancy is not just about getting and giving advice. The word descriptive in its title is important. Before participants get advice on problems they have brought to the group, they enjoy the opportunity of learning how others frame and understand their problems. The result is that they often gain insights they never otherwise could. Nancy Mohr, who designed this protocol, used it especially to help groups of educators become facilitative leaders. Over a series of meetings, the educators would present a number of problems to each other for descriptive consultation. In this process, they not only obtained better perspectives of their own problems, they also became better consultants to one another.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of Descriptive Consultancy is to help someone think through a problem by framing it herself or himself, then hearing how others frame it. That is why participants are encouraged to be more descriptive than judgmental. An assumption behind the use of the protocol is that framing and reframing a complex problem is an especially valuable step in moving toward creative, focused problem-solving. The protocol also includes an advice-giving step.

### **Procedure (50 min. total)**

#### **Step One- Problem Presentation (5 min.)**

The presenting group member describes the problem or question about practice, laying its different dimensions as she or he sees them and including previous attempts to address it or recent experiences that have led to the question.

#### **Presentation of evidence (5 min.)**

Presenter shares her evidence of the problem or current practice: recording or transcript, video of a lesson, lesson plan, a piece of student work or a combination.

#### **Step Two- Clarifying Questions (5 min.)**

Other members of the group, acting in the role of consultants, ask questions of the presenter. These are meant to elicit information that the consultants need to consult.

#### **Step Three- Reflecting Back (10 min.)**

The presenter is silent while each of the consultants describes what he or she heard in the presentation of the problem and saw/heard in the evidence.

*Consultants consider the following questions:*

What did you see/hear? What didn't you see/hear?



Are there discrepancies between the evidence and the presenter's description of the problem?

What is important to the presenter?

What do you need to know more about?

**Response (5 min.)**

The presenter briefly responds to the consultants expressed understanding of the problem and provides further clarification of the problem as appropriate.

**Step Four- Brainstorming (10 min.)**

The presenter is again silent while the consultants brainstorm possible solutions or next steps by posing succinct questions:

What if...?

Have you thought about...?

**Response (5 min.)**

The presenter responds again, this time talking about how he or she might be thinking now as a result of what has been said. Here the presenter does not so much answer the group's questions as present her or his new insights gained through listening.

**Step Five- Debrief (5 min.)**

The facilitator(s) asks participants about their roles:

How did it feel to be the presenter?

How did it feel to be the consultant?

What did you learn?

**Facilitation Tips**

During the process, the facilitator should monitor the groups use of the steps, not hesitating to intervene if they are not being followed.

In explaining and monitoring, the facilitator should especially emphasize the importance of reflecting back a description (descriptive and literal), rather than making a judgment or proposing a solution. The watch phrase should be, "Don't rush to advice before it's time."

The facilitator should also emphasize that the reason we reflect back and listen carefully to the reflections, is to acknowledge that people inevitably have different takes on a complex problem. The power of Descriptive Consultancy is in learning from these tasks.

*Name:* Chrissy Williams  
*Subject:* Multi-subject  
*Grade level:* n/a

### **Lingering Questions**

At the end of our ItAG, we felt that we still needed to reflect on some lingering questions. What came up during our sessions that we still have questions about? What didn't come up at all that is worth addressing?

You can adjust this activity to use with students (for example, at the end of a unit as a way to reflect on essential questions). The timing is flexible and this can be done in large or small groups.

*Materials:* colored paper

*Participants:* 4+

*Length of time:* ~20 minutes (2-3 minutes per question)

*Process:*

1. Participants write a question about the topic (in our case, "writing for social justice") at the top of their colored paper.
2. Participants pass their papers to the right and respond to the question that the person next to them asked (2 minutes).
3. After two minutes, participants pass the paper to the right and respond to the next question.
4. Return the question paper to its original owner. Allow people to read over their peer's responses.
5. Go-around share out of "favorite ideas."

*Note:* This can go on for as long as the facilitator wants. You do not have to pass it as many times as there are people. You might adjust the time if you want participants to also respond to the other people's comments before writing their own answer.

Name: Kayty Himmelstein  
Subject: Math  
Grade Level: Algebra 1 (middle and high school)

## Teaching Proof-Writing in Algebra

*The challenge:* How can we teach proof-writing in such a way that students are able to...

- ...recognize the necessity for and purpose of proof?
- ...evaluate proofs and identify weaknesses or gaps?
- ...write and revise their own proofs of important mathematical ideas?

*Why proof?*

Proof is a major dimension of *doing* mathematics; most mathematical activity (outside of K-12 classrooms) involves developing conjectures or hypotheses, then testing and ultimately proving them. In relation to the theme of this collection, proof also helps its practitioners to develop a variety of skills essential to the struggle for social justice: in its *Principles and Standards*, the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics writes,

Mathematical reasoning and proof offer powerful ways of developing and expressing insights about a wide range of phenomena. People who reason and think analytically tend to note patterns, structure, or regularities in both real-world and mathematical situations. They ask if those patterns are accidental or if they occur for a reason. (NCTM)

Moreover, proof allows students to define features of convincing arguments, and practice crafting their own. Through proof, students can begin to view themselves as creators of knowledge, not merely consumers.

Despite the obvious benefits of teaching proof, I have often struggled to teach it in my classes. In the first place, proof has no formal place in the high-stakes assessment my students must pass to graduate from high school, and is likely to play almost no role in students' future high school or college math classes (aside from students who choose majors or careers in mathematics). In addition, proof is usually thought of as too "high-level" for an Algebra 1 class; I have often chosen to focus on seemingly more accessible analytical skills (problem-solving, communication, representations), rather than proof. Finally, I myself do not feel entirely confident with proof-writing, and have felt daunted by the task of trying to teach it to others.

At the same time, I know that many of my own most mathematically engaging and powerful experiences have involved creating and analyzing proof. For this reason, and those described above, I am seeking to integrate proof more substantially into my Algebra 1 classes, using the strategies outlined below. I hope that they may be useful to other math teachers as well.

*Possible strategies for addressing this challenge:*

1. *Provide an audience.* Students struggle to understand why we need to prove something we are confident is true. An audience for the proof can provide a context in which students are able to better understand the purpose of proof as providing a convincing,

coherent argument for another person. Examples of audiences include a symposium hosted at a school or within a class, in which students present a proof and provide evidence (which may include writing, images, demonstrations, calculations) that their argument is correct. Another possibility is to create a class math journal in which students can publish their finished proofs. Asking students to prepare different versions of the proof for different audiences (for example, a symposium, a friend, a younger student, a family member) may also help students to develop a more thorough understanding of their own proof, as well as how mathematical symbols and vocabulary may be used as tools for communication.

2. *Model*. Most math students rarely see or analyze proofs; they therefore struggle to understand the purpose or structure of proofs. Providing students with models, including proofs of properties students are familiar with (for example, for Algebra 1 students, the commutativity of multiplication), can be a good starting point. To engage students in actively reading these models, students may be asked to highlight key points, summarize, or create diagrams to accompany these examples. Students can also be asked to find the fallacious steps in false proofs (for example a proof that  $1 = 2$ ). Additionally, students may understand the purpose and structure of proof better if they are able to make connections to their work in other courses, such as essay-writing in English or social studies classes. Using similar language (for example, "thesis," or "supporting evidence") may be helpful.

3. *Scribes*. Students are often better able to construct a proof argument verbally than they are in writing. To help students make the transition to written proofs, students may be placed in pairs, with one student serving as the scribe while the other student describes his or her argument. This is a good way to create a first draft of the text of the proof; after reading their transcript, students often realize, for example, that the order in which they presented statements or ideas should be changed, or that certain phrases or sentences should be made more specific.

4. *Scaffolds*. Proofs often rely on several days of work carried out in stages (for example, exploration of a phenomenon, summary of the exploration, development of a hypothesis, collection of evidence). Encouraging students to collect these pieces through journaling or handouts allows students to build their proof gradually and have resources to draw upon when it finally comes time to write. One word of caution: excessive scaffolds can make the process of proof-writing both cognitively low-level and seemingly without purpose for students. When students are merely filling in blanks or putting together pieces in a recipe, they may lose sight of their ultimate goal: providing evidence to support an argument. Instead, structures that ensure students maintain this goal as their focus, such as simple graphic organizers or prompts, may be helpful.

### *Conclusion*

Though challenging to learn and teach, proof-writing has the potential to play a powerful role in students' lives. I hope to begin a conversation about how we can integrate proof throughout students' math educations, rather than saving it for advanced topics or cordoning it off in geometry courses. I look forward to learning new strategies from other educators, and to continuing to push myself and my students to

convince ourselves and each other that our mathematical hypothesis and discoveries are, in fact, true.

#### *Acknowledgements*

The ideas above were developed through a descriptive consultancy protocol, in which I described my challenge to three other members of the ItAG. Many thanks to Marissa, Jenn, and Ama, for careful listening and fabulous ideas.

#### *Sources*

National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. *Principles and Standards for School Mathematics: Executive Summary*. National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Web. 15 March 2012.



Name: Stuart Kermes  
Subject: Multi-subject  
Grade Level: 9-12

### **Connecting across Generations through the Use of “Mental Models”**

*Overview:* After introducing the idea that a mental model is an implicit, or explicit theory that we hold about how a portion of the social world works, students apply this idea to a comparison of one or more mental models that they currently hold to the corresponding mental models of their grandparents (or some other old person).

*Steps:*

1. Introduction of the concept. This can be done in a number of ways. I distinguish mental models from paradigms or beliefs by emphasizing that mental models shape the decisions that people make. I try to link the examples to the content of the course. In social studies or history you can use ideas on a personal level such as family or marriage, or on a macro level such as white supremacy or democracy. In each case, the theory or mental model shaped the decision-making of the people involved.
2. Then I ask them to interview a grandparent, or some other “old person” who grew up in a different time period. You can be more or less specific about the assignment depending upon how much structure and focus your students need to be successful.
3. After the interview, (which you can break off into its own assignment and discuss in class before the more formal writing) I ask my students to write a short essay comparing one or more mental models of their grandparent with the corresponding one of their own. At this point you can use whatever writing process you have used for your class.

*Results:*

Surprisingly, this assignment is often the first time that many of my students have had an extended adult-level conversation with their grandparent. Many discover some similarities that surprise them regarding their mental models and their grandparents such as around certain family values or definitions of success. In many cases, the differences around such things as marriage, life goals and expectations, gender roles etc. provoke interesting discussions about where those differences come from and on what basis they think their mental models are more valid.

Depending upon the content area, this exercise can be used as a bridge into discussions of changes in society, preparation for a piece of literature by an author from another social context than themselves, or a discussion about a controversial current topic such as same-gender marriage.

Name: Marissa Metelica

Subject: Writing/ELA

Grade Level: 8-12

### Writing from a Quote

The imagination will not down... If it is not a dance, a song, it becomes an outcry, a protest. If it is not flamboyance it becomes deformity; if it is not art it becomes crime. Men and women cannot be content any more than children, with the mere facts of a humdrum life- the imagination must adorn and exaggerate life, must give it splendor and grotesqueness, beauty and infinite depth.

- William Carlos Williams

What do you think could be meant by the lines:

"If it is not a dance, a song, it becomes an outcry, a protest. If it is not flamboyance it becomes deformity; if it is not art it becomes crime..."?

Do you agree or disagree with William Carlos Williams? Why?

Have you ever felt a dance, a song inside of you turn into a protest? If so, did it happen similar to how William Carlos Williams describes or was your experience different than that description?

### Ethnicity and History Class

Name one thing your history classes taught you about your ethnicity. Does that narrative differ from what you have learned at home about your history? If so, what is one thing you wish your history books or lessons would celebrate about your ethnic legacy?

*Purpose:* This prompt is intended to spark reflection in students about dominant culture, and their own location within the spectrum of voice and privilege.

This exercise could be used as a warm up to introduce a conversation about power and/or cultural and racial dominance.

Name: Helen Rubinstein

Subject: Writing (Personal writing)

Grade level: 6th & up (I use this for 11th, 12th, and college)

### Prompts for Personal and Creative Writing

- *Walk back in time.* Use this exercise to help students brainstorm potential topics for personal writing. Have them begin by listing all the places they can think of that they encounter in their life right now. These could be places big or small—"school," or "my closet." That corner of the kitchen. The table at McDonald's where they always sit. Then, guide them slowly back in time: "Now list places in your life from the summer...from last year..." and so on, until they are listing the earliest places they can remember. Once they have a full list, ask students to look over what they have and pick a place that stands out—to go to that place, describing it in full, maybe using the five senses.
- *Photographs.* Depending on students' age and ability, this exercise could be done with a real photograph (have students bring in a photo of a moment they remember), or with a mental photograph (thinking back on a memory, pick a moment that stands out, and take a mental snapshot of that moment). Begin by having students describe the photo (in writing) as they'd describe it to someone who doesn't have it in front of them—what's in the background, who the people are, what expressions they're making, specific details... Then have them describe what's outside the frame of the picture. What sounds could be heard at the moment the photo was taken? What was happening two minutes before the photo? Two hours before? Two days, two months, two years before...? What happened just after the shutter clicked? An hour later? The next day, the next month, the next year, ten years later...? Finally, ask how the photo relates to students' lives now.
- *And/But/So game.* I use this game to encourage students to think logically about how their sentences relate to each other. Begin by writing a starter sentence on the board. I usually use something like *We lived then in \_\_\_\_ in \_\_\_\_*. Have students copy the sentence at the top of a sheet of loose paper and fill in the blanks, e.g., *We lived then in Chicago in a houseboat on the river*, or *We lived then in squalor in the middle of everything*. Then have them add a sentence that begins with *And*—e.g., *And all we ever ate was Popsicles*—and pass the paper to the next person. Each student will receive a paper with the starter sentence and an *And* sentence, and they should continue by adding a *But* sentence that makes sense with the first two—e.g., *But soon our tongues seemed to be permanently frozen*. Then have them pass it to the next person, who must read the three previous sentences and come up with a fourth, beginning with *So*—e.g., *So we went out looking for something new to eat*. Continue having students pass the sheet to the next person, writing logical *And*, *But*, *So* statements, in that order. The exercise can also be used to discuss register—e.g., it's appropriate to begin sentences with *And*, *But*, *So* in informal writing, but in a more formal paper, we'd want to begin with other logical transitions, e.g., *In addition*, *However*, *Therefore*.

Name: Lindsey Johnson  
Subject: Special Education  
Grade Level: 9-12

### Student Solution Letter

*Objective:* Based on the poem "Where I'm From" by Willie Perdomo, students will write a well-written letter about an issue that needs to be resolved or changed in their neighborhood.

| Skills                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Students will be able to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>⬆ Determine the importance of the text</li><li>⬆ Make connections with the text</li><li>⬆ Make inferences about character internal and external conflict</li><li>⬆ Evaluate how character's conflicts impact their decisions or choices</li><li>⬆ Understand the composition and format of a business/proposal letter</li><li>⬆ Practice the writing revision process</li><li>⬆ Improve written skills: word choice, spelling, verb tense, punctuation, sentence structure, clarity, active voice</li></ul> |

| Tasks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Students will:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>⬆ Introduce the purpose of the letter: <i>Who are you, what is this letter about?</i></li><li>⬆ Explain the conflict or issue: <i>What is the issue/conflict?</i></li><li>⬆ The proposed solution: <i>What do you think the solution should be?</i></li><li>⬆ Expected results of solution: <i>How will this solution result in positive change?</i></li><li>⬆ Resources: <i>Who will help make this change? How can this person/people help? What might this person/people be able to do that you or others may not be able to?</i></li></ul> |

1. *Introduction to Poem:* What do you think this poem will be about based on the title? What do you already know about this author/poet? What do you think about as you read this title?

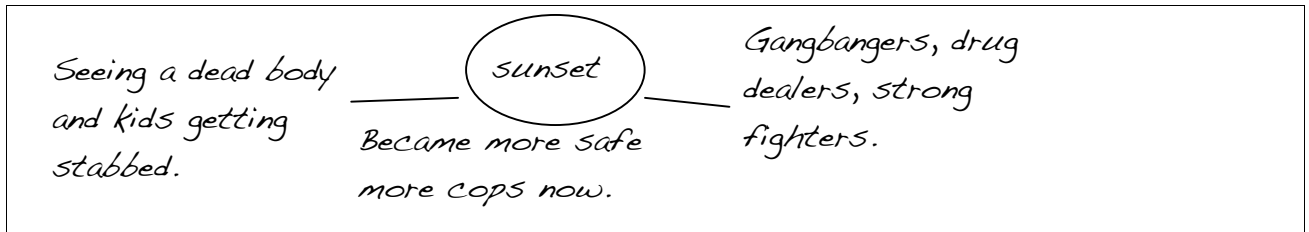
2. *Reading the poem:* As we read this text, think about the things we learn about this person or the topic they are writing about. Underline or highlight anything you find interesting.

3. *Making Connections:* Students will answer the following questions using the brainstorming map in the space provided.

- ⬆ If the sidewalks and streets could talk, what would they say about your neighborhood? What do they see?
- ⬆ What do the sidewalks and streets know about people in your neighborhood that outsiders do not?

- ⤴ What do they appreciate and treasure about your neighborhood?
- ⤴ What are they ashamed of and want to change in your neighborhood?

(student writes)



4. Teacher and students will select lines from the “Where I’m From” to dissect and further understand their meaning.

Example:

Line from Poem: Tarzan has learned quickly to ignore the woman who begs her man to stop slapping her with his fist. “Please baby? Por favor! I swear it wasn't me. I swear to my mother. Mameeee!!” (her dead mother told her this would happen one day.)

Prompt 1: In your own words, describe what is happening in the lines above. What is the conflict?

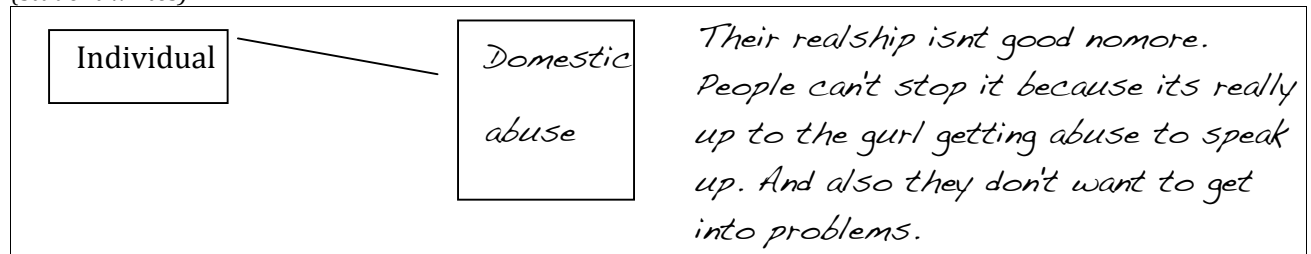
The conflict: (student writes) *Seeing a woman get slapp by husband/man/BF.*

Prompt 2: What effect does this conflict have on the individuals involved? (student writes)

| Negative Effect                                        | Positive Effect |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <i>-She's getting hurt<br/>(mentally and phycially</i> |                 |

5. Teacher and student will begin to further analyze and get a deeper understanding of the conflicts individuals face. Why do these conflicts happen? Is there anyone preventing these conflicts from happening? Why or why not?

(student writes)



Based on the conflicts the individuals face in their neighborhood, what choices do you think they will make in their lives? What makes you think they will make these choices?

(student writes)

| Negative Choice                                                | Why will they make this choice?                                                                       | Positive Choice | Why will they make this choice? |
|----------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------|
| <i>To not speak up and keep letting her husband abuse her.</i> | <i>She's scare to speak up and face the problem with her husband. Has fear things most get worst.</i> |                 |                                 |

Think about the negative choices this individual could make based on the conflicts they face. How would his/her life be different if he/she did not have to make these choices?

*If the lady would have speaks up and put a stop on domestic abuse by her husband right know she would great. Not crying or be scare of geting hit no more. She would get help to help her let go of that domestic abuse.*

If an individual has the power to change the conflicts that force other individuals to make negative choices (including his or herself)

- What do you think they should change?
- How do you think they can make this change?
- What would be the result of this change (what do you think will happen as a result of this change)?

*The thing they should change is by speaking up and putting a stop on the domestic abuse. Because no woman should be hit and go throw abuse. I think if they do this chanceing their would be women speaking up and stop the abuse they go throw. They would stop being scare knowing they help out there.*

1. Do you think the conflicts this author discusses in his memoir poem are issues that happen in other cities, towns, and/or other countries? What makes you think this?

2. Think about the solutions and positive changes you came up with for the neighborhood conflicts. Who do you think can make these changes? Who do you think has the power to make these changes?

Snippet of Student Letter, Draft (after series of revisions and edits)

*My name is Ana Rosario and I am a student at West Brooklyn Community High School in Brooklyn, New York. I am writing to you to inform you of the physical and mental domestic abuse some women might experience. There needs to be more support for these women nationwide.*

*I believe one of the biggest issues at this time for women is the domestic abuse women experience by their husbands. Women are scared to speak up and put a stop to it! The longer they do not say anything, the longer this is going to continue. Women fear getting abused by their husbands for speaking up which prevents them from talking.*

*I think we should open a clinic for abused women or any woman that might go through any problem and feel as though they are alone. Show them that they should not be afraid to speak up and know that whatever they are going through, they are not alone. In this program, we will listen to them without any judgements. They should also know that any children or women that are abused will be safe with us. We will take care of them and give them a place to live as well as all the supports they need. We will be sure to open a clinic where they may stay as much as they want until they are ready to move on.*

Name: Ariela Rothstein

Subject: Global Studies [Middle East Studies course in Regents Global Sequence]

Grade Level: 9-12

## Political Memoir

### Unit Overview:

*Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi, in both drawn and film version, was the main source/text for our study of Iranian history. Pre-watching the film, students had spent time studying different answers to the question 'what role should religion play in government?' They created and learned definitions of colonialism, fundamentalism and sharia law. Then they created a timeline of the history of Iran, connecting bigger concepts to single events. As they watched, they took notes in the form of 'Tweet' reactions. Students who normally shied from writing more than a few words wrote pages of Tweets. After watching the film, students created 'outcome rubrics for society.' What would a society look like that achieved success after a revolution (politically, economically, etc.)? The final assessment below came from a 'problem' I brought to my iTag's small group, and after an hour of protocol brainstorming: How could I keep the energy of student writing from their gut reactions ("Tweets") to the film and transition into teaching/learning critical writing skills?

### FINAL PROJECT

#### MIDDLE EAST STUDIES

##### A Political Memoir

*Directions:* For the final project, you will be writing a **political memoir** - a memoir that connects your life and experiences in this country to Marjane's life and experiences in Iran during the Revolution, or to a larger problem in American society. You will use pre-writing, drafting, and revision strategies in class to turn this into a professional piece that could be sent to Marjane Satrapi.



*Assignment:* Take your outcome rubric of the revolution and society and turn it into written form: what is life like in this country *now*? What do you *want* it be like? What bigger national events [recession/crime/police brutality/social movements/etc.] can you tie personal/specific experience to? And how does all of this compare to Marjane's telling of *her* story and *Iran's* story in *Persepolis*?

### Why this assignment?

1. Different types of writing all fall into the category of 'history.'
2. Think about the essential questions of this unit: why Iran? why now? -> What's this got to do with us? Start listening/reading the news so you can answer this question
3. Developing your own voice about other countries, this country, and how you think government should be.



| Outcome                            | M                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | E                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |
|------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Iranian Revolution                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- makes connections to Iranian history: references from film, class notes or extra research at least 3 events, figures, or ideas from the Revolution of 1979.</li> <li>- evaluates revolution using outcome rubric</li> </ul>                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- use of information about Iranian revolution goes above and beyond what was introduced in class; demonstrates independent research and deep exploration of the ideas and facts surrounding the Revolution.</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                              |
| Using Evidence to Address the Task | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- makes connections to Marjane's life [personal] [3]</li> <li>- uses specific examples [1-2] from life in USA to demonstrate points to audience in Iran</li> <li>- Analyzes [overkill] most evidence used. [why is it important? what connections can you make? how does it compare?]</li> <li>- <b>Cites</b> all sources used</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- makes connections to Marjane's life [&gt;3]</li> <li>- uses specific examples [1-2] from life in USA to demonstrate points to audience in Iran</li> <li>- Analyzes [overkill] <b>all</b> evidence used. [why is it important? what connections can you make? how does it compare?]</li> <li>- <b>Cites</b> all sources using academic [MLA] citations.</li> </ul> |
| Writing with an Outline            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- introduces context of personal details/experience</li> <li>- introduction includes at least one piece of a 'powerful introduction'</li> <li>- completes an outline [no matter the format you choose]</li> <li>- conclusion addresses next steps/moving forward</li> </ul>                                                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-uses and changes best practices of outlining from class [5 paragraph essay outline, pieces of a body paragraph, etc.] to address their format</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Revision                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- makes <b>substantive</b> and <b>grammatical</b> changes to writing</li> <li>- gets feedback on at least 1 draft before final</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- provides substantive feedback to a classmate</li> <li>- suggests substantive changes for your own work [rather than just teacher-directed]</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |

E outcome:

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Writing with a thesis | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- political purpose for the memoir is clear: what do you want your reader to understand afterwards?</li> </ul> <p>ways to accomplish this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>⬆ Audience and purpose is clear in the thesis statement [if essay] - or context [if not essay]</li> <li>⬆ Thesis statement presents a new argument not presented in class.</li> <li>⬆ Thesis is clear and a nuanced interpretation of history, showing both/multiple sides</li> </ul> |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

*Model structure for students:*

1. Introduction of Problem
2. Personal Experience with Problem
3. Connection of experience to larger problem
4. Conclusion: So what? Why did you choose this problem? What would you like to see?

A few exercises to get students going:

### **POLITICAL MEMOIR**

#### **STEP 1: THE FREEWRITE**

When you thought of something you were *angry* about in the USA last week, it may have been because you/someone you know has had some *experience* with such a problem. Your peers may have raised something that happened to them/someone they knew during class time, or talked to you about it at lunch. Think of a specific example of the ***problem*** in the USA affecting you/someone you know/a story you heard.

*[note: Depending on YOU, it may be easier to think of a story first and then connect to a problem, or think of a problem first and then connect it to a story]*

1. *Choose a Problem:* [some examples from class: animal abuse, police harassment/brutality/racism, child molestation, gun violence, prostitution, stop and frisk, lack of health insurance, no say in war, etc.]

Problem : \_\_\_\_\_

2. *Choose a Story:* Freewrite (Tweet form, poem, write as much as you can, don't worry about spelling/grammar/format, just try to get the story down clearly)

### Evaluating the Iranian Revolution of 1979

What would the Revolution need to do to get an 'E'? In each box, provide bullet points on what the 'new' government would need to look like (for you). Ex: [Political] people can disagree with the government without fear of torture (M)

Outcome:

| Outcome                                                                               | Not yet                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Meeting Expectations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Exceeding Expectations                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Political freedom                                                                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In Iran, when you speak your mind or protest, you get penalized by the government, brutally beaten</li> <li>- In NYC, many people are stopped daily for random searches</li> </ul>                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- vote for who we want to lead us</li> <li>- cops should base search on social disturbances</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a law stating that we can say what we want, pray to whomever we want</li> <li>people can disagree with government, not be penalized and changes actually made; what the people want</li> <li>- stop searches and profiling</li> </ul>                                                                         |
| Social improvements                                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no religion</li> <li>- no dress code</li> <li>- social classes</li> <li>- poor far from rich</li> </ul> <p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listen to whatever music we want</li> <li>• drink and smoke if we choose to</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- strict religion</li> <li>- strict dress code</li> <li>- communism</li> </ul> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• listen to whatever music we want</li> <li>• drink and smoke if we choose to AND</li> <li>• women able to mingle with non family males and not looked at as slut</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-strong religion by choice</li> <li>-dress code most days</li> <li>-capitalism, but social classes barely apart</li> </ul> <p>-----</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-listen to whatever music we want</li> <li>• wear what they want, no social classes, no racial profiling</li> </ul> <p>-----</p> |
| Economic improvements                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- people still doing drugs</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- people die everyday [now], so we might as well legalize it</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- they should legalize it so people won't have to get it from corner stores</li> <li>- no social classes</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Other:<br>- Major decision-making<br>- Peace improvements<br>- Education improvements | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- no choice in war</li> <li>- no choice in anything</li> <li>- a lot of kids dropping out of school</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a way for citizens to openly speak to government and they consider ideas</li> <li>- no racial profiling</li> <li>- we should have more alternative schools</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- government couldn't make certain decisions without it going through a citizen's union (all regular citizens, no government)</li> <li>- no police brutality</li> <li>no legal weapons to civilians (authority only)</li> </ul>                                                                                 |

### Reflection:

Based on what you saw in the film and what you've learned so far in class – was the Iranian Revolution worth it? Yes/no/why

## POLITICAL MEMOIR

### STEP 1: THE FREEWRITE

### STEP 2: PURPOSE FOR WRITING

*Aim:* Why did Marjane write *Persepolis*?

*Do Now:* Best guess - why do you think Marjane wrote *Persepolis*? What was her *purpose for writing*?

*Mini Lesson:* Purpose for writing - what is that?  
Another definition of political

*Vocabulary:*

Nationalism: showing love for country, or a movement to create an \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ nation

Autonomous: self-governing [ex: free of US imperial control]

*Reflection question:* Was writing *Persepolis* a *nationalist* act? Why / not?

*How does Marjane relate the personal to the political? Looking at two chapters from the graphic novel*

*Activity:* Take 1 chapter from [novel form] *Persepolis*. Pull out at least two places where she connects the personal to the political. Describe the connections in full sentences.

*Exit slip*

[re]Read Satrapi's introduction:

What is her motivation for writing *Persepolis*? How do you know? Use evidence from her introduction and from the chapters we looked at in class.

What would they say to someone in Iran about their life in America? What would they choose to share? The idea that Marjane wrote this with love of her country in mind

Next day:

What *audience* are you writing to:

What *point* are you trying to get across ["thesis" / "argument"]:

*Student Sample #1*  
**The Injustice of Learning**  
*Ashley Lewis*

When I was 14, we were studying racism in my 7<sup>th</sup> grade history class. We watched videos of racist cartoons in the 1900s. African Americans were depicted as monkeys more than humans. We had big pink lips with big ears and big feet to match. In the cartoon, Blacks wore no shoes. They were always asleep and being lazy. When the black children would cry, they were given a slice of watermelon to quiet them. This was my first view on how serious racism was. In younger grades, they just taught you a dumbed down version of racism and the KKK. Teachers never showed or taught us the real violent events like the lynching, hanging or the bombings that happened to African Americans, their families and homes. At that age, all I knew about was crosses being burned and meetings being held for racists, segregationists and white supremacists.

By the 1950s, racism became so serious that segregationists and racists did everything in their power to keep schools from integrating. The book, *Warriors Don't Cry* by Melba Pattillo Beals, is an example of how racism was sugarcoated. In younger grades instead of reading that book, we read about the Ruby Bridges story. In *Warriors Don't Cry*, they tell about all the violent events like death threats and the mental and physical abuse the Little Rock Nine endured trying to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. The Ruby Bridges story just tells us how she had to be escorted to and from school by a guard. There weren't any details about the mob that waited outside her school or how integration affected her personal life.

Also, learning from textbooks can be an injustice to learning some historical events. Textbook writers might not tell the whole truth. When learning about Christopher Columbus, what they don't tell us about is how he enslaved and slaughtered many Tainos. Up until high school, I only knew mere details of Columbus landing in America instead of Asia, where he thought he was. What I never learned was how he forced the Tainos to bring back gold and their other treasures in exchange for nearly nothing. Columbus told them if the Taino people didn't get gold for him, he would start to slay and slaughter them. Now Christopher Columbus is being celebrated for something that should not be celebrated.

I think students should be given all of the known details of history even if there is no exact truth. That way they can get both sides of the story and won't be robbed of their knowledge. We should be able to learn from our past to improve our future. In *Persepolis* by Marjane Satrapi, Marjane makes a comment about how people outside of Iran considered Iranians to be uncivilized people who killed each. They probably learned that about Iranians in school. She also showed a clip of her teachers telling them to rip everything about the Shah out of textbooks. This shows how greatly the education system is flawed.

*Student Sample #2*  
**Streets of Brooklyn**  
*Shantana Jackson*

What is police harassment? Why does it happen? Police harassment is when law enforcement officials abuse their power. I believe that this is a serious issue because a lot of young boys are getting pulled over by cops or even random searched by the cops, and put in the jail system at a very young age. Why are 1 in 9 young black men in prison? I don't think police have a right to search you just because you look suspicious. In the law enforcement eyes young black men or any young man is always up to no good.

There was an incident involving one of my family members and police harassment. My cousin and her friends were in the park hanging out when they noticed a police car driving by. The police drove their car in the park where my cousin and her friends were. The police started asking them questions like, were you guys ever arrested. One of my cousin's friends did go to jail before, but he had just got out of the system. The police officers went to their car and started to check my cousin and her friend's records. I think that was police harassment because why would they drive into the park where kids are playing just to question my cousin and her friends about being arrested before. My cousin and her friends weren't doing anything wrong, they were just hanging out talking. I think situations like this are a huge problem because police officers are a higher power than everyday citizens. I feel police officers take advantage of that power.

There are 41,100,000 black people in the U.S. That represents 13.5% of the population 18,583,000 Are black men and 2,859,000 of those black man are in their 20's. According to the sentencing project, 1 out of 8 black men in their 20's is in prison or jail. Police have the authority and the duty to question people suspected for committing crimes. They also have the authority and duty to lawfully look for evidence regarding crimes and to arrest those they believe have committed crimes. There are some types of questioning, searches, and arrests, however which may be considered harassment. Some police officers get carried away with the higher power they get because we look up to them to protect us. I would like to see less black men in the jail system.

I choose this issue because i think the problem is getting worse. I remember my mother and I were driving in Brownsville and I saw a lot of cop cars pulling over young black men. I was upset because i know a lot of young men that go through that situation with the cops. I feel that people need to know about this issue because it happens everyday and I want to inform people about this problem. Persepolis inspired me to write how I feel about the world we live in, and that it is not wrong to say what's on your mind.

*Student Sample #3*

## **How The American Criminal Justice System Affects Innocent Bystanders**

*Ranitta Jeffrey*

When I was about one, I had a bedroom the size of an average living room in a regular size apartment. As I got older, I could never understand why I lived in a house made of glass, why I lived in an all white area or why I had garbage bags full of money in my closets. When I was about 12, I finally got a better understanding of why certain things were a bit different in my household.

When I moved to Brooklyn, things changed. I didn't have any family out there, all of them lived far away. As I got older, I realized things that changed my life.

All of the people around me were getting put away for the minor things in life. The government took my father, my great uncle, and my other uncle. They even started taking my friends away from me. The government took away my life. Every male in my life was gone to the system by time I was 14 years old.

I wondered why they didn't take the men that abused my neighbors and family. Why they didn't take away the men with guns? Why didn't they take away people that harm the community? Instead they took away the people that did the minor things like sold drugs.

The people that sell drugs tend to get put away for a longer period of time than people that commit crimes such as rape and homicide. This is what the government calls its "criminal justice system".

An average rapist or murderer serves less time than an average drug dealer. For example, Erica Holm who murdered 19-year-old Robert Martinelli of Worcester, MA, only served three months behind bars. Normally for killing someone, the murderer should get twenty-five to life because they took someone's life. Another example being Michael Plush who sexually assaulting three 9-year-old girls in Wellesley, MA, only served 18 months in jail. To break it down he served 6 months for each girl he raped. To take someone's innocent at the age of 9 the criminal should do at least 3 years for each person (Boston News).

In America, they feel selling drugs to people who want and ask for them is worse than killing or even raping someone. For example, my dad who was convicted by the law enforcement when he was just 16, was sentenced to 9 years in prison for selling drugs. My uncle, the youngest brother of all my aunts and uncles, got arrested then sentenced for 12 years for having 3 kilos of illegal substance. My other uncle coming from my dad's side got arrested for four years for selling drugs.

I feel this isn't fair to the people who sell drugs. They're not at all innocent but they shouldn't serve more time than a murderer or a rapist. In America, an average drug dealer serves around 8 to 12 years. The reason for such a long sentence is because they are supposedly "endangering the public". If the buyers want drugs then it should not be public endangerment. The sellers should not be punished for the needs or wants of someone else, they are just the provider.

This isn't just unfair to them, it's unfair to the people who love them. The government is punishing the innocent bystanders too. By the age of 14, all the male role models in my life were gone. This matters to me because I had no one to look to as a young lady growing up in Brooklyn. There's fights, guns, violence and bad guys all around me, how was I supposed to know what a good man was if I had none in the presence of my eyes.

Work Cited:

"Drug Dealers Spend Years In Jail Under Sentencing Law" Boston News.

<http://www.thebostonchannel.com/news/26955657/detail.html#ixzz1pBsuYG00>



Name: Joy Osborne  
Subject: English  
Grade Level: 9

### Planning and Researching Your Racial Identity Essay

This week's weekly assignment is part of a process that should result in your writing a highly effective final essay on The Color of Water. As you know, McBride has written a memoir about his life and his mother's life, with a focus on their racial identities (remember Ms. Schlein's demo?).

For your major essay on this text, you are going to be writing about what, based on your research, your personal experience and The Color of Water tell you, race *means*. In order to do that, you are going to do three types of research:

- ⤴ You are going to watch a video about the history of racial categories in American culture and choose one article that you feel offers you information about the topic.
- ⤴ You are going to interview other people about their thoughts on race
- ⤴ You are going to do some reflective writing about your own experiences

After your research is done, you will sit down in class and begin to consider *what, exactly, you believe race means*.

STEP ONE is this week's weekly assignment. Here are the steps to completion:

6. Between today (Thursday) and Monday 3/12, you must
  1. Use a computer that has the Internet and watch the "Timeline Movie" on [www.understandingrace.org](http://www.understandingrace.org). You can find the movie under the "History" section of the website.
  2. Use the other resources on that website to find an article about the history of race that you can read and understand independently. Print it out and bring it to class on Monday.
7. Between Monday 3/12 and Thursday 3/15, you must
  1. Use your 10 interview questions about race (created in class on Monday) to interview three people: a non-family adult, a peer, and an adult in your family.
  2. Record those answers either by hand or with a free voice-recording app on your Apple or Android device. Either way, they should be able to be played or read in class on Thursday.
  3. Take a picture of each of your interviewees and have those files available to print out in class on Thursday.

*STEP TWO* is this week's weekly assignment. Here are the steps to completion:

- ⤴ Read three of the articles in the packet of race articles you and your peers have gathered.
- ⤴ Annotate them completely.
- ⤴ Identify 3 quotes from each article that resonate with you.
- ⤴ Copy those quotes from the article and "zoom-in" to them on the sheet you will be provided on *Monday*.

*To receive full credit, you must have three fully annotated articles and a thoughtfully completed Zoom-Ins Worksheet on Thursday in class.*

*Note: Zooming In means to ask the following questions of a quote from a text:*

- ⤴ What are the key words in this quote that show the truth of your claim?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- ⤴ What does this quote say to me, the reader, about the topic of my essay?  
\_\_\_\_\_

*STEP THREE* is **WRITING!**

Let's do this! Your final product should:

- Be 5 or more paragraphs long
- Be typed in 12 point, Times New Roman font, double-spaced
- Include information from all three types of sources: interviews, personal reflection and non-fiction articles
- Have a clear, supported thesis statement (we will work on these together)
- Have a cover page that clearly lists your name, my name, English 9, a title, and any pictures you think adequately represent your paper's topic.
- Be as awesome and complex as your thoughts are. Go get 'em!

Name: Rosie Frascella  
Subject: English Language Arts  
Grade Level: 12

### Self-Perception Personal Essay

Topic Question: How have life experiences, archetypes in the media and society, and definitions of race and social class impacted your actions and beliefs about *your own life* and the way *you* see *yourself*?

Write an essay to answer this question. (Note: Your final essay for *The Bluest Eye* will be this same question but in reference to one of the characters in the book.)

For this mini-essay, you ARE NOT using the book to answer this question. You're using your own ideas, class notes, and personal experiences to help you answer the question. The evidence you provide to develop your controlling idea should come from yourself, not the book.

Some sub-topic questions to think about as you are figuring out what to write are:

- How are race and class interconnected in our lives?
- What is beauty? How is beauty constructed?
- How are race, concepts of beauty and family, and media / culture (think about archetypes) used to create oppression in society, and internalized oppression (self-hatred) in individuals?
- Do individuals have agency (the power) to break social constructs of beauty and family?

Your essay should be typed, and formatted with 12-point font, double-spaced, 1-inch margins.

*Student Sample #1*

## **The Negative Effects of Archetypes in My Life**

*Kiara Paredes*

According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, "Over 10.2 million cosmetic surgical and nonsurgical procedures were performed in the United States in 2008." As this statistics shows, there were countless of folks living under American society that with the desire of changing something about themselves. Clearly, media and society has been in charge of introducing specific ways in which one must look in order to be seen as beautiful. Unfortunately, for the majority of people, there will always be something missing to obtain the "perfect" look. Throughout this essay, I will explore how has life experiences, archetypes in the media and society, and definitions of race and social classes impacted my actions and beliefs about my own life and the way I see myself.

My ideas of beauty have been gathered out of all I have seen in TV, magazines, Internet and other types of media. However, beauty can be seen from different perspective. From mine, in order for a girl to be beautiful she has to be skinny and fit, long hair, clean/smooth skin, big perky breast, light eyes and hair and neither too much or too little of butt. On the other hand, for a man to be beautiful must be tall, strong, chisel face, nice teeth, six pack, fit/big muscles, athletic, light skin and eyes, and straight dark hair. Me as a young girl, these archetypes have always made me feel very uncomfortable. Whether it is because of my hair or my weight, society has never allowed me to even consider myself to be beautiful. A way in which these archetypes of beauty have affected me is by making me feel ugly and not enough only for having curly hair. I clearly remember how back in my country, the Dominican Republic, no one says curly or straight hair but they refer to the straight as the "good hair" and to the curly as the "bad hair". Thus, I grew with the belief that my hair was bad and that I must perm it to look beautiful otherwise I will be laughed at. Another example in which the archetype of beauty has affected me can be seen in the numerous diets and ways I have tried to loose weight. Since I was a child, I have always hated myself for being overweighed. Sometimes I look at myself in the mirror and I like the way I look, but as soon as I look at a magazine or watch TV, I force myself to stop dreaming that I am beautiful, because in the eyes of others, I am compared to a cow and that makes me feel "inferior". When I look back into my memories I remember my mom telling me to tuck in my stomach so I could look skinny and pretty. I believe that this archetype has frustrated me in such a way that I suffer when I eat because I think that as I eat, I'm having less chances of being beautiful. Sometimes I wonder if there is real beauty or if it is just a way in which others want one to look. After having considered the impacts that archetypes of beauty has made in my life, I conclude that one must understand how every person has its unique opinion and that there is no exact beauty but the way you see yourself.

Moreover, society and media has given us ideas of the perfect family. Once again, my belief about a perfect family has been constructed out of what I have always

seen in the different types of media. When I think of a perfect family I think of the man and the woman that are happily married and have two children; a girl and a boy. They live in a nice house with a big, clean and beautiful garden. A family in which the father goes to work every morning dress up in his suit carrying a suitcase while the wife stays home maintaining the house, taking care of the children, and baking cookies just like the "Dick and Jane" story. In my family, I am the 6th and the last kid. My father's four first children were all men, thus my father was dying to get a girl so he got my sister. However, when my mom got pregnant with me, my father wanted her to abort and because she didn't because he believed that only one girl was needed so I came to represent the extra that only came to ruin his almost "perfect" family. The archetype of a perfect family that my father had has had very strong and negative impacts in my life. One example can be seen as the aggressiveness I set on myself since many years ago. I was sick and tired of been rejected, of been denied of a hug or a kiss and always being pushed away from my father while I witnessed the intense love he had for his first girl. Because of the lack of love received from my father, I started to behave badly in a way to try to get some attention or love not knowing that I was hurting myself. I was most hurt when my father brought my sister alone the US leaving me in the country. I was devastated I by witnessing how my father was capable of leaving me alone so he could enjoy the perfect family he wanted. After these life experiences, I tried various times to harm and even suicide myself so I could erase the only "mistake" that stopped my father from having a "perfect" family. Through a deep analysis of the effects of the archetypes of family carried on media and society have got in my life, I am now able to understand how harmful archetypes are and how badly people can be affected when pursuing these archetypes impose by media. I strongly believe that archetypes are just the illusion of many ones who don't feel comfortable about them and because of that; they want others to also feel in the same way.

Furthermore, I believe it is one's life experience that shapes the way of thinking. As far as I remember, I have been taught to define race by your color or ethnicity. I remember how few weeks ago in my U.S. Government class, the teacher asked us to group ourselves by our race. Immediately, every single student started to group up either with the ones of their color or their language. That issue tremendously impacted me as I noticed how society has created certain definitions that only exist in our minds. Besides race, the issue of class has been something I have learned and notice to be present in people's mind. I define class as your socioeconomic status. I remember back in my country how insignificant one of my cousin used to be for being from the low class. However, as soon as he traveled to the US, he was consider being a king and even to be special as people thought that he was rich. That is just one of my life experiences that have taught me that one is valued based on how much you have. This and many other life experiences, has also affected me in a negative way by forcing myself to work hard in life and become rich because if I don't do so, then I will be a significant person.

Nevertheless, I found myself to be strongly connected with the character Pecola Breedlove in the novel *The Blues Eyes* by Toni Morrison. The archetypes of beauty and family are taught throughout the novel. The author characterizes Pecola as an unsecure and low self-esteem person who believes she to be ugly only for not having the traits “required” to be beautiful. Morrison uses her character to show the reader how harmful archetypes can be. Pecola, who is a young black girl, prays every night for blue eyes. In my case, I pray to be skinny. The way in which her character lives not feeling secure about her, makes me think on the statistic mentioned at the very beginning that shows how many people are constantly desiring and/or trying to change something about themselves in order to finally fit into societal and media’s archetype of perfection.

In the long run, I have learned how archetypes carried on through media and society has not only impacted me but also countless of people to the point of making them live under the pressure of desiring and following a model or an ideal that unfortunately, will be impossible to obtain because there is nothing perfect. In conclusion, my life experiences, archetypes in the media and society plus my definitions of race, class and beauty has strongly impacted my life and my way of thinking as wanting me to follow this specific rules stated by the society.

The big issue to me right now is not the beauty, it is not the class and it is not the race; but it is something that teaches us how to be better human being. It is something that we all should be striving for. It plays big role in our life and at some point everybody lives by it. It is none other than religion; religion is great way for us to spend our life peacefully, but it also answers the questions "why we are here?" "What is the overall purpose of our lives?" It is not easy for people to decide what is the right path, because people are born into different religions. Because people do not explore other religions, they start to build stereotypical and racist views against others. And, they also start labeling certain groups based on one person's action. Some people will do everything to show others their superiority. I consider myself to be a victim of religious discrimination.

Being in America is great opportunity for people, because they can easily achieve what they want compared to other nations. Even though being in America has made life more livable with better housing, better education and all the facilities, it has also made me build an insecure feeling. Every day when I turn on my T.V I see news about Muslims. If a Muslim does a horrifying act of killing, few media broadcasts and some people label the whole Muslim nation as evil. However, if someone from another religion does something as equally as horrifying his or her religion is not brought into the matter. The some media broadcast have made Muslims look as if they are evil human beings; thus, people who don't know about Islam start labeling Muslims by what they have done. After 9/11, even though the people who have done it don't portray the Muslim world correctly, I start to feel more hatred and discrimination towards Muslims not only from the people but the government. The idea that Muslims are all evil and so forth does not correctly portray who we are. As I am sitting home and not causing trouble, people are burning the Qur'an. It didn't just end there; recently the NYPD was caught spying on kids all over the North East. Many University Presidents were enraged including Yale's and NYU's. They feel that there should be no hate among any groups. Besides spying on students at MSAs (Muslims Students Associations), the NYPD files show they have also spied on Mosques and growing Muslim neighborhoods. They surely are protecting us from terror attacks, but that is invading privacy and breaking amendment 14. I feel that whatever I say will be recorded and I cannot live like all other people. Sometimes I think I cannot make a small joke like my other non-Muslims friends do. My cousin is part of an MSA and he himself said he feels very insecure, and that we're just trying to attain a higher degree of education and make a living. What has the learning youth and peaceful Muslim societies done? They are far more civilized than people who are breaking the law and protesting on Wall Street.

At times I wished we were portrayed like every other religion, and not based on a certain group's actions. For example, the KKK is a terrorizing group; and the first

thing that comes to my mind is not Christianity when they are mentioned. On the other hand, when Islam is mentioned certain people think of terrorism. This makes me think of Japanese American's case when they were forced to put in internment camps because Japan attacked Pearl Harbor; however, Muslims never attacked America so why are Muslims being spied on and being discriminated against. I have never seen any other religion being criticized like mine. I really wish that we could all abolish these discriminated ideas and live in peace.



Name: Elissa Vinnik  
Subject: English Languages Arts  
Grade Level: 9-12

### **The Bridge Poem**

*Kate Rushin*

I've had enough  
I'm sick of seeing and touching  
Both sides of things  
Sick of being the damn bridge for  
everybody

Nobody  
Can talk to anybody  
Without me

Right?

I explain my mother to my father my  
father to my little sister  
My little sister to my brother my brother to  
the white feminists  
The white feminists to the Black church  
folks the Black church folks  
To the ex-hippies the ex-hippies to the  
Black separatists the  
Black separatists to the artists the artists to  
the my friends' parents. .

Then I've got to explain myself  
To everybody  
I do more translating  
Than the Gawdamn U.N.

Forget it  
I'm sick of it  
I'm sick of filling in your gaps

Sick of being your insurance against  
The isolation of your self-imposed  
limitations  
Sick of being the crazy at your holiday  
dinners  
Sick of being the odd one at your Sunday  
Brunches  
Sick of being the sole Black friend to 34  
individual white people

Find another connection to the rest of the  
world  
Find something else to make you  
legitimate  
Find some other way to be political and  
hip  
I will not be the bridge to your  
womanhood  
Your manhood  
Your humanness

I'm sick of reminding you not to  
Close off too tight for too long

I'm sick of mediating with your worst self  
On behalf of your better selves  
I am sick  
Of having to remind you to breath  
Before you suffocate  
Your own fool self.

Forget it  
Stretch or drown  
Evolve or die

The bridge I must be  
Is the Bridge to my own power  
I must translate  
My own fears  
Mediate  
My own weaknesses I must be the bridge  
to nowhere  
But my true self  
And then  
I will be useful.

*Will this book help me solve my particular problem, challenge or goal?*

\* Over the course of the seven weeks, this Write On! ItAG helped foster the meaning of social justice within the writing context.

\* ItAG participants helped develop their understanding of social justice within their own curriculum as well as their philosophies of education.

*What kind of results can I expect to get by reading this book (for a self-help or how-to book)? or What kind of experience might I expect in reading this book?*

\* develop your understanding on social justice and how it relates to your students and the work you do with them.

\* use the resource as a guide on how to meaningfully incorporate social justice in your curriculum, classroom, school setting.